

Why Hitler Declared War on the United States

[John Wear](#)

Abstract

Establishment historians state that Adolf Hitler made a mistake when he declared war on the United States. For example, British historian Andrew Roberts wrote:[\[1\]](#)

“It seems an unimaginably stupid thing to have done in retrospect, a suicidally hubristic act less than six months after attacking the Soviet Union. America was an uninvadable land mass of gigantic productive capacity and her intervention in 1917-18 had sealed Germany’s fate in the Great War.”

Historian Martin Gilbert wrote in regard to Germany’s declaration of war on the United States:[\[2\]](#)

“It was perhaps the greatest error, and certainly the single most decisive act, of the Second World War.”

In this article I will explain why Hitler was forced to declare war on the United States.

American Steps toward War

In his State of the Union address to Congress on January 6, 1941, Roosevelt outlined his plan for lend-lease aid to the anti-Axis powers. International law has long recognized that it is an act of war for a neutral government to supply arms, munitions, and implements of war to a belligerent. But Roosevelt brushed off objections to lend-lease based on international law. Roosevelt stated:

“Such aid is not an act of war, even if a dictator should unilaterally proclaim it to be.”

In this same speech, Roosevelt barred the door to suggestions of a negotiated peace:[\[3\]](#)

“We are committed to the proposition that the principles of morality and considerations of our own security will not permit us to acquiesce in a peace dictated by aggressors and sponsored by appeasers.”

President Roosevelt signed the Lend-Lease Act into law on March 11, 1941. This legislation marked the end of any pretense of neutrality on the part of the United States. Despite soothing assurances by Roosevelt that the United States would not get into the war, the adoption of the Lend-Lease Act was a decisive move which put America into an undeclared war in the Atlantic.

It opened up an immediate appeal for naval action to insure that munitions and supplies procured under the Lend-Lease Act would reach Great Britain.[\[4\]](#)

On April 9, 1941, the United States entered into an agreement with a Danish official for the defense of Greenland. Roosevelt simultaneously illegally sent American Marines to occupy Greenland.[\[5\]](#)

In June 1941, Roosevelt agreed with Churchill to relieve the British troops in Iceland, and this was done with U.S. Marines on July 7, 1941.[\[6\]](#) Also in June 1941, Roosevelt ordered the closing of all the German and Italian consulates in the United States.[\[7\]](#)

Another step toward war was the adoption on April 24, 1941, by the United States of a naval patrol system in the Atlantic to insure delivery of munitions and supplies to Great Britain. The American Navy under this scheme was assigned the responsibility of patrolling the Atlantic Ocean west of a median

point represented by 25° longitude. American warships and planes within this area would search out German vessels and submarines and broadcast their position to the British Navy. Roosevelt tried to represent the naval patrol as a merely defensive move, but it was clearly a hostile act toward Germany designed to help the British war effort.[\[8\]](#)

The first wartime meeting between Roosevelt and Churchill began on August 9, 1941, in a conference at the harbor of Argentia in Newfoundland. The principal result of this conference was the signing of the Atlantic Charter on August 14, 1941. Roosevelt repeated to Churchill during this conference his predilection for an undeclared war, saying:

"I may never declare war; I may make war. If I were to ask Congress to declare war, they might argue about it for three months."

The Atlantic Charter was in effect a joint declaration of war aims, although Congress had not voted for American participation in the war. The Atlantic Charter, which provided for Anglo-American cooperation in policing the world after the Second World War, was a tacit but inescapable implication that the United States would soon become involved in the war. This implication is fortified by the large number of top military and naval staff personnel who were present at the conference.[\[9\]](#)

Roosevelt's Orders to Shoot-on Sight German Ships and Submarines

Roosevelt's next move toward war was the issuing of secret orders on August 25, 1941, to the Atlantic Fleet to attack and destroy German and Italian "hostile forces." These secret orders resulted in an incident on September 4, 1941, between an American destroyer, the *Greer*, and a German submarine.[\[10\]](#) Roosevelt falsely claimed in a fireside chat to the American public on September 11, 1941, that the German submarine had fired first.

The reality is that the *Greer* had tracked the German submarine for three hours, and broadcast the submarine's location for the benefit of any British airplanes and destroyers which might be in the vicinity. The German submarine fired at the *Greer* only after a British airplane had dropped four depth charges which missed their mark. During this fireside chat Roosevelt finally admitted that, without consulting Congress or obtaining congressional sanction, he had ordered a shoot-on-sight campaign against Axis submarines.[\[11\]](#)

On September 13, 1941, Roosevelt ordered the Atlantic Fleet to escort convoys in which there were no American vessels.[\[12\]](#) This policy would make it more likely to provoke future incidents between American and German vessels. Roosevelt also agreed about this time to furnish Britain with "our best transport ships." These included 12 liners and 20 cargo vessels manned by American crews to transport two British divisions to the Middle East.[\[13\]](#)

More serious incidents followed in the Atlantic. On October 17, 1941, an American destroyer, the *Kearny*, dropped depth charges on a German submarine. The German submarine retaliated and hit the *Kearny* with a torpedo, resulting in the loss of 11 lives. An older American destroyer, the *Reuben James*, was sunk with a casualty list of 115 of her crew members.[\[14\]](#) Some of her seamen were convinced the *Reuben James* had already sunk at least one U-boat before she was torpedoed by the German submarine.[\[15\]](#)

On October 27, 1941, Roosevelt broadcast over nationwide radio his Navy Day address. Roosevelt began his Navy Day address by stating that German submarines had torpedoed the U.S. destroyers *Greer* and *Kearny*. Roosevelt characterized these incidents as unprovoked acts of aggression directed against all Americans, and that “history will record who fired the first shot.”

What Roosevelt failed to mention in his broadcast is that in each case the U.S. destroyers had been involved in attack operations against the German submarines, which fired in self-defense only as a last resort. Hitler wanted to avoid war with the United States at all costs, and had expressly ordered German submarines to avoid conflicts with U.S. warships, except to avoid imminent destruction. It was Roosevelt’s shoot-on-sight orders to U.S. Navy vessels that were designed to make incidents like the ones Roosevelt condemned inevitable.[\[16\]](#)

Despite Roosevelt’s provocations, the American public was still against entering the war. By the end of October 1941, Roosevelt had no more ideas how to get into a formal and declared war:[\[17\]](#)

“...He had said everything ‘short of war’ that could be said. He had no more tricks left. The hat from which he had pulled so many rabbits was empty.”

Even full-page advertisements entitled “Stop Hitler Now” inserted in major American newspapers by Roosevelt’s supporters had failed to sway the American public. The advertisements warned the American people that a Europe dominated by Hitler was a threat to American democracy and the Western Hemisphere. The advertisements asked: “Will the Nazis considerately wait until we are ready to fight them? Anyone who argues that they will wait is either an imbecile or a traitor.” Roosevelt endorsed the advertisements, saying that they were “a great piece of work.”[\[18\]](#)

Yet the American people were still strongly against war.

Roosevelt Provokes Pearl Harbor Attack

Provoking Japan into an overt act of war was the principal policy that guided Roosevelt’s actions toward Japan throughout 1941. Lt. Cmdr. Arthur H. McCollum, head of the Far East desk of the Office of Naval Intelligence, wrote an eight-action memorandum dated October 7, 1940, outlining how to provoke a Japanese attack on the United States.[\[19\]](#)

The climax of Roosevelt’s measures designed to bring about war in the Pacific occurred on July 25, 1941, when Roosevelt froze all Japanese assets in the United States. This brought commercial relations between the nations to an effective end, including an end to the export of oil to Japan.

Prince Konoye, the Japanese premier, requested a meeting with Roosevelt to resolve the differences between the United States and Japan. American Ambassador Grew sent a series of telegrams to Washington, D.C. in which he strongly recommended that such a meeting take place. However, Roosevelt steadfastly refused to meet with the Japanese premier.[\[20\]](#)

Foreign Minister Toyoda made a dispatch to Japanese Ambassador Nomura on July 31, 1941. Since U.S. Intelligence had cracked the Japanese diplomatic code, Roosevelt and his associates were able to read this message:[\[21\]](#)

“Commercial and economic relations between Japan and third countries, led by England and the United States, are gradually becoming so horribly strained that we cannot endure it much longer. Consequently,

our Empire, to save its very life, must take measures to secure the raw materials of the South Seas... I know that the Germans are somewhat dissatisfied with our negotiations with the United States, but we wish at any cost to prevent the United States from getting into the war, and we wish to settle the Chinese incident."

This obvious Japanese desire for peace with the United States did not change Roosevelt's policy toward Japan. Roosevelt refused to lift the oil embargo against Japan. The Roosevelt administration was well aware that Japan imported approximately 90% of her oil, and that 75% to 80% of her oil imports came from the United States. Roosevelt also knew that the Netherlands East Indies, which produced 3% of the world's oil output, was the only other convenient oil producer that could meet Japan's import needs.[\[22\]](#)

On October 31, 1941, an oil agreement between Japan and the Netherlands East Indies expired. The Netherlands East Indies had promised to deliver about 11.4 million barrels of oil to Japan, but actually delivered only half of that amount. The Japanese Navy had consumed approximately 22% of its oil reserves by the time the war broke out.[\[23\]](#)

By the closing months of 1941, the United States was intercepting and breaking within a matter of hours almost every code produced by Japan.[\[24\]](#) In the last week of November 1941, President Roosevelt knew that an attack by the Japanese in the Pacific was imminent.

Roosevelt warned William Bullitt against traveling across the Pacific:[\[25\]](#)

"I am expecting the Japs to attack any time now, probably within the next three or four days."

Roosevelt and his administration knew this based on the intercepted Japanese messages. This information was not given to the commanders at Pearl Harbor to enable them to prepare for and thwart the Japanese attack.

Adm. Husband Kimmel, commander-in-chief of the U.S. Pacific Fleet, states that if he had all of the important information then available to the Navy Department, he would have gone to sea with his fleet and been in a good position to intercept the Japanese attack.[\[26\]](#) Kimmel concludes in regard to the Pearl Harbor attacks:

When the information available in Washington was disclosed to me I was appalled. Nothing in my experience of nearly 42 years of service in the Navy had prepared me for the actions of the highest officials in our government which denied this vital information to the Pearl Harbor commanders.

If those in authority wished to engage in power politics, the least that they should have done was to advise their naval and military commanders what they were endeavoring to accomplish. To utilize the Pacific Fleet and the Army forces at Pearl Harbor as a lure for a Japanese attack without advising the commander-in-chief of the fleet and the commander of the Army base at Hawaii is something I am wholly unable to comprehend.[\[27\]](#)

The Rainbow Five Plan

On December 8, 1941, President Roosevelt made a speech to Congress calling for a declaration of war against Japan. Condemning the attack on Pearl Harbor as a "date which will live in infamy," Roosevelt did not once mention Germany.

Hitler's policy of keeping incidents between the United States and Germany to a minimum seemed to have succeeded. Hitler had ignored or downplayed the numerous provocations that Roosevelt had made against Germany. Even after Roosevelt issued orders to shoot-on-sight at German submarines, Hitler had ordered his naval commanders and air force to avoid incidents that Roosevelt might use to bring America into the war. Also, since the Tripartite Pact did not obligate Germany to join Japan in a war initiated by Japan, it appeared unlikely that Hitler would declare war on the United States. [28]

The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor surprised Hitler. Hitler had never wanted Japan to attack the United States. Germany had repeatedly urged Japan to attack Singapore and the rest of Great Britain's Far East Empire, but Japan refused to do so. After the war Col. Gen. Alfred Jodl said that Hitler had wanted Japan to attack Great Britain and the Soviet Union in the Far East, which would have set up a two-front war. Hitler thought Roosevelt would probably not be able to persuade the American public to go to war to defend Britain's Asian colonies. Jodl said that Hitler had wanted in Japan "a strong new ally without a strong new enemy." [29]

Hitler's decision to stay out of war with the United States was made more difficult on December 4, 1941, when the *Chicago Tribune* carried in huge black letters the headline: F.D.R.'s WAR PLANS! The *Washington Times Herald*, the largest paper in the nation's capital, carried a similar headline.

Chesly Manly, the *Tribune's* Washington correspondent, revealed in his report what Roosevelt had repeatedly denied: that Roosevelt was planning to lead the United States into war against Germany. The source of Manly's information was no less than a verbatim copy of Rainbow Five, the top-secret war plan drawn up at Roosevelt's request by the joint board of the United States Army and Navy. Manly's story even contained a copy of President Roosevelt's letter ordering the preparation of the plan. [30]

Rainbow Five called for the creation of a 10-million-man army, including an expeditionary force of 5 million men that would invade Europe in 1943 to defeat Germany. On December 5, 1941, the German Embassy in Washington, D.C., cabled the entire transcript of the newspaper story to Berlin. The story was reviewed and analyzed in Berlin as "the Roosevelt War Plan." On December 6, 1941, Adm. Erich Raeder submitted a report to Hitler prepared by his staff that analyzed the Rainbow Five plan. Raeder concluded the most important point contained in Rainbow Five was the fact that the United States would not be ready to launch a military offensive against Germany until July 1943. [31]

On December 9, 1941, Hitler returned to Berlin from the Russian front and plunged into two days of conferences with Raeder, Field Marshal Wilhelm Keitel, and Reichsmarschall Hermann Göring. The three advisors stressed that the Rainbow Five plan showed that the United States was determined to defeat Germany. They pointed out that Rainbow Five stated that the United States would undertake to carry on the war against Germany alone even if Russia collapsed and Britain surrendered to Germany. The three advisors leaned toward Adm. Raeder's view that an air and U-boat offensive against both British and American ships might be risky, but that the United States was already unquestionably an enemy. [32]

On December 9, 1941, Roosevelt made a radio address to the nation that is seldom mentioned in the history books. In addition to numerous uncomplimentary remarks about Hitler and Nazism, Roosevelt accused Hitler of urging Japan to attack the United States. Roosevelt declared: [33]

"We know that Germany and Japan are conducting their military and naval operations with a joint plan. Germany and Italy consider themselves at war with the United States without even bothering about a

formal declaration...Your government knows Germany has been telling Japan that if Japan would attack the United States, Japan would share the spoils when peace came. She was promised by Germany that if she came in she would receive control of the whole Pacific area and that means not only the Far East, but all the islands of the Pacific and also a stranglehold on the west coast of North and Central and South America."

All of the above statements are obviously lies. Germany and Japan did not have a joint naval plan before Pearl Harbor, and never concocted one for the rest of the war. Germany did not have foreknowledge and certainly never encouraged Japan to attack the United States. Japan never had any ambition to attack the west coast of North, Central, or South America. Germany also never promised anything to Japan in the Far East. Germany's power in the Far East was negligible. [\[34\]](#)

Roosevelt concluded in his speech on December 9, 1941: [\[35\]](#)

"We expect to eliminate the danger from Japan, but it would serve us ill if we accomplished that and found that the rest of the world was dominated by Hitler and Mussolini. So we are going to win the war and we are going to win the peace that follows."

On December 10, 1941, when Hitler resumed his conference with Raeder, Keitel, and Göring, Hitler said that Roosevelt's speech confirmed everything in the *Tribune* story. Hitler considered Roosevelt's speech to be a de facto declaration of war. Since war with the United States was inevitable, Hitler felt he had no choice but to declare war on the United States. Hitler declared war on the United States in his Reichstag speech on December 11, 1941, stating among other things:

Since the beginning of the war, the American President Roosevelt has steadily committed ever more serious crimes against international law. Along with illegal attacks against ships and other property of German and Italian citizens, there have been threats and even arbitrary deprivations of personal freedom by internment and such. The increasingly hostile attacks by the American President Roosevelt have reached the point that he has ordered the American navy to immediately attack, fire upon and sink all German and Italian ships, in complete violation of international law. American officials have even boasted about destroying German submarines in this criminal manner. American cruisers have attacked and captured German and Italian merchant ships, and their peaceful crews were taken away to imprisonment. In addition, President Roosevelt's plan to attack Germany and Italy with military forces in Europe by 1943 at the latest was made public in the United States, and the American government made no effort to deny it.

Despite the years of intolerable provocations by President Roosevelt, Germany and Italy sincerely and very patiently tried to prevent the expansion of this war and to maintain relations with the United States. But as a result of his campaign, these efforts have failed. [\[36\]](#)

Hitler ended this speech with a declaration of war against the United States. Roosevelt had finally gotten a declared war with Germany using Japan as a back door to war.

Closing Thoughts on Hitler's Declaration of War against the United States

No nation has ever been led into war with as many soothing promises of peace as the American public received from President Roosevelt. Most of the American public felt that the United States had entered the First World War under false pretenses. Polls consistently showed that the American public did not

favor entry into a second war in Europe. Roosevelt assuaged these fears with statements such as “...I have passed unnumbered hours, I shall pass unnumbered hours, thinking and planning how war may be kept from this nation.”^[37]

The truth is that Roosevelt did everything in his power to plunge the United States into war against Germany. Roosevelt eventually went so far as to order American vessels to shoot-on-sight German and Italian vessels—a flagrant act of war. However, Hitler wanted to avoid war with the United States at all costs. Hitler expressly ordered German submarines to avoid conflicts with U.S. warships, except to prevent imminent destruction. It appeared that Hitler’s efforts would be successful in keeping the United States out of the war against Germany.

Hitler declared war on the United States only after the leaked Rainbow Five plan convinced him that war with the United States was inevitable. The extraordinary cunning of leaking Rainbow Five at the very time he knew a Japanese attack was pending enabled Roosevelt to overcome the American public’s resistance to entering the war. It allowed the entry of the United States into World War Two in such a way as to make it appear that Germany and Japan were the aggressor nations.^[38]

Notes

- ^[1] Roberts, Andrew, *The Storm of War: A New History of the Second World War*, New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2011, pp. 193f.
- ^[2] Gilbert, Martin, *The Second World War: A Complete History*, New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1989, p. 277.
- ^[3] Chamberlain, William Henry, *America’s Second Crusade*, Chicago: Regnery, 1950, pp. 129f.
- ^[4] *Ibid.*, p. 130.
- ^[5] Sanborn, Frederic R., *Design For War: A Study of Secret Power Politics, 1937-1941*, New York: The Devin-Adair Company, 1951, p. 258.
- ^[6] Churchill, Winston S., *The Grand Alliance*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1950, pp. 149f.
- ^[7] Sanborn, Frederic R., “Roosevelt is Frustrated in Europe,” in Barnes, Harry Elmer (ed.), *Perpetual War for Perpetual Peace*, Newport Beach, CA: Institute for Historical Review, 1993, p. 216.
- ^[8] Chamberlain, William H., *op. cit.* (note 4), pp. 136f.
- ^[9] Sanborn, Frederic R., “Roosevelt...,” *op. cit.* (note 7), pp. 217f.
- ^[10] *Ibid.*, p. 218.
- ^[11] Chamberlain, William H., *op. cit.* (note 4), pp. 147f.

- [12] *Hearings Before the Joint Committee on the Investigation of the Pearl Harbor Attack*, 79 Cong., 2 sess., 39 parts; Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1946, Part V, p. 2295.
- [13] Churchill, Winston S., *op. cit.* (note 6), pp. 492f.
- [14] Chamberlain, William H., *op. cit.* (note 4), pp. 148f.
- [15] *Newsweek*, November 10, 1941, p. 35.
- [16] "Roosevelt's 'Secret Map' Speech," *The Journal of Historical Review*, Vol. 6, No. 1, Spring 1985, pp. 125f.
- [17] Sherwood, Robert E., *Roosevelt and Hopkins, an Intimate History*, New York: Harper & Brothers, 1948, p. 438; see also Churchill, Winston S., *op. cit.* (note 6), p. 539.
- [18] Johnson, Walter, *The Battle against Isolation*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1944, pp. 85-87.
- [19] Stinnett, Robert B., *Day of Deceit: The Truth about FDR and Pearl Harbor*, New York: The Free Press, 2000, pp. 6, 8.
- [20] Morgenstern, George, "The Actual Road to Pearl Harbor," in Barnes, Harry Elmer (ed.), *Perpetual War for Perpetual Peace*, Newport Beach, CA: Institute for Historical Review, 1993, pp. 327-331.
- [21] *Hearings Before the Joint Committee on the Investigation of the Pearl Harbor Attack*, 79 Cong., 2 sess., 39 parts; Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1946, Part XII, p. 9.
- [22] Miller, Edward S., *Bankrupting the Enemy: The U.S. Financial Siege of Japan Before Pearl Harbor*, Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2007, p. 162.
- [23] Sanborn, Frederic R., *Design for War*, *op. cit.* (note 5), p. 424.
- [24] Stinnett, Robert B., *op. cit.* (note 19), p. 83.
- [25] Feb. 12, 1946, conversation between William Bullitt and Henry Wallace, from Henry Wallace Diary, Henry Wallace Papers, Library of Congress Manuscripts, Washington, D.C. Quoted in Tzouliadis, Tim, *The Forsaken: An American Tragedy in Stalin's Russia*, New York: The Penguin Press, 2008, p. 240.
- [26] Kimmel, Husband E., *Admiral Kimmel's Story*, Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1955, p. 110.
- [27] *Ibid.*, p. 186.

- [28] Meskill, Johanna Menzel, *Hitler and Japan: The Hollow Alliance*, New York: 1955, p. 40.
- [29] Fleming, Thomas, *The New Dealers' War: FDR and the War within World War II*, New York: Basic Books, 2001, pp. 31f.
- [30] *Ibid.*, p. 1.
- [31] *Ibid.*, pp. 1f., 33.
- [32] *Ibid.*, pp. 33f.
- [33] *Ibid.*, pp. 34f.
- [34] Meskill, Johana M., *op. cit.* (note 28), pp. 1-47.
- [35] <http://millercenter.org/president/fdroosevelt/speeches/speech-3325>
- [36] "The Reichstag Speech of 11 December 1941: Hitler's Declaration of War Against the United States," *The Journal of Historical Review*, Vol. 8, No. 4, Winter 1988-1989, p. 412.
- [37] Chamberlain, William H., *op. cit.* (note 4), p. 98.
- [38] <http://www.veteranstoday.com/2008/06/16/rainbow-5-roosevelts-secret-pre-pearl-harbor-war-plan-exposed/>

Author(s) :	John Wear
Title:	Why Hitler Declared War on the United States
Sources:	<i>Inconvenient History</i> , Vol. 9, No. 3 (2017)
Dates:	published: 2017-08-31, first posted: 2017-08-31 14:02:54

<http://inconvenienthistory.com/9/3/4882>